

WORK ZONE

REDUCING MISHAPS BY 50%

Defensive Driving

Seventy-three Sailors and 46 Marines dead...six Sailors and five Marines totally disabled...one Sailor and 13 Marines partly disabled...another 131 Sailors and 27 Marines with major injuries (involving five or more lost workdays). Those FY04 numbers are grim reminders of the toll our nation's highways continue to take on our most precious resource.

And the carnage doesn't stop there. Nationwide, more than 41,000 people die in motor-vehicle crashes each year, and more than two million suffer disabling injuries, according to the National Safety Council. The triple threat of high speeds, impaired or careless driving, and not using occupant restraints threatens every driver—regardless of how careful or how skilled.

Driving defensively means not only taking responsibility for yourself and your actions but also keeping an eye on “the other guy.” The National Safety Council suggests these guidelines to help reduce your risks on the road:

- Don't start the engine without securing each passenger in the car, including children and pets. Safety belts save thousands of lives each year. Lock all doors.
- Remember that driving too fast or too slow can increase the likelihood of collisions.
- Don't kid yourself; if you plan to drink, designate a driver who won't drink. Alcohol is a factor in almost half of all fatal motor-vehicle crashes.
- If you're taking a prescription medication, read the warnings on the label. Consult your physician or pharmacist about how your medication or over-the-counter drug could affect your driving.
- Be alert! If you notice that a car is straddling the center line, weaving, making wide turns, stopping abruptly, or responding slowly to traffic signals, the driver may be impaired. Avoid an impaired driver by turning right at the nearest corner or taking the closest exit. If it appears that an oncoming car is crossing into your lane, pull over to the roadside, sound the horn, and flash your lights. Immediately notify the police about any motorist driving radically.
- Follow the rules of the road. Don't contest the “right of way” or try to race another car during a merge. Be respectful of other motorists.
- Don't follow too closely. Always use a three-second or three-second-plus following distance.
- While driving, be cautious, aware and responsible. Never exceed the posted speed limit; weather conditions permitting, always maintain the legal speed limit. When driving on a highway, always be prepared for drivers to change lanes suddenly in order to exit. Don't let emotions dominate your driving. Don't drive when you're tired; if

you feel tired, pull off the road for some exercise, fresh air, and a cup of coffee, or take a nap.

- Drive a well-maintained vehicle, checking these elements at least weekly: cooling system (radiator, radiator cap, thermostat, and hoses), brake and brake fluids, belts (fan, alternator, and air conditioning), tires, engine fluids (motor oil, transmission fluid, and coolant), lights, wiper blades.
- Expect other drivers to make mistakes at intersections. Here are four preventive rules to follow:
 - When approaching a green light, be prepared for it to turn red. It may have been green for a long time.
 - When stopped at a red light and it turns green, proceed slowly. Look left and right before you drive through the intersection.
 - Yellow lights mean proceed with caution, not speed up to get through the intersection before the light turns red.
 - Turning right at a red light is not permitted in every state. Even in states where it is permitted, turning right isn't allowed in some intersections. Watch for signs at the intersection.
- If you're going to pass a car, follow these rules:
 - Make sure you're in a passing zone.
 - Be certain there is no oncoming traffic.
 - Look in all mirrors carefully before you make a lane change. Look behind you for any vehicles that might be trying to pass you. Be aware of any blind spots. Once the lane is clear, signal your intentions, move into the passing lane, and accelerate past the car in front of you.
- Never look directly at an approaching car's headlights. Use the right edge of the pavement as a lane guide until the other car has passed.
- Be aware of any potential road hazards. Watch for cars that suddenly swerve from their lanes to avoid pot holes, construction barriers, or stalled vehicles.
- Bad weather, such as rain, snow or fog can make driving difficult. Always watch for these conditions and be prepared to take defensive actions. Follow these bad-weather tips:
 - Slow down if the roads are wet because the tires on your car can lose traction.
 - If your car goes into a skid because of snow and ice on the roads, immediately take your foot off the accelerator. Keep your foot off the brake, and steer in the direction the rear of the vehicle is skidding. Hold the steering wheel firmly, but don't make any large turns. Use a light touch to correct the problem.
 - Slow down as you approach shaded areas, bridges and overpasses in winter because these areas freeze first and stay frozen longer. ■